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ABSTRACT

Evaluations of Chapter 1 programs usually center on one of three questions: (1) Does the program constitute an appropriate Federal investment? (2) Does the program have the potential to benefit students? and (3) Is the program feasible enough to implement? Often, evaluators and legislators disagree over which of these questions is most important. In the case of Chapter 1, getting the money to the right children is an outcome of great interest, and many congressmen assume that once that is accomplished, it is up to the district to see that the funds are used effectively. At the moment, the most asked question concerns whether and how well a proposed program can be implemented. This is evident in the National Institute of Education's (NIE) mandate to study the reauthorization of Chapter 1: of the seven items of information requested by Congress, six concerned implementation, and only one concerned effectiveness. It is likely that the 1987 reauthorization hearings will reflect this configuration of questions. Thus, the NIE study will focus on four implementation questions (administration, targeting, program design, and services). This study differs from others in its efforts to review existing evidence (rather than gathering new data) and in the design of its implementation study, which emphasizes the way context can influence the fate of the Chapter 1 program. Two very different kinds of contexts can have an impact: (1) local organization factors and the management and budgetary constraints faced by Chapter 1 directors, and (2) the educational "mood" of the district, and nation, regarding the desired direction of education. (KH)

The National Assessment

of the Chapter 1 Program

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National Institute of Education

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After working in the Chapter 1 program and discovering its long history of evaluation, I have become increasingly aware that there are certain basic questions that are asked on almost any evaluation occasion. And although I became aware of these questions within the context of the Chapter 1 program, I think the questions are probably universally applicable. That is, they are likely to be asked by almost any legislator or educational administrator who must decide whether or not to authorize a particular program. The trick for the evaluator is not to discover what these questions are, but rather to discover what form they are taking at the moment. The first of these questions has to do with whether the program under consideration constitutes a legitimate or appropriate investment in light of the funding agency's mission. In federal education policy, this question plays itself out as one of defining the appropriate federal role in education. But the question of appropriateness comes up in debates about state and local policy as well. For instance, debates about the relative emphasis on academic versus vocational education programs in secondary schools are often couched in terms of appropriateness for the agency. The

second question is whether the program has the potential to benefit students--that is, whether it is or could be effective. Anyone who must make a funding decision will want some assurances regarding the benefits that are likely to occur as a result of the program. Finally, there is the question of whether the program is feasible, or could be made feasible, to implement.

While I have argued that these questions are universally applicable, I have also argued that they are not universally applied, or at least not uniformly applied. They receive different emphases by different people at different times and in different circumstances. Furthermore, each question, regardless of its form, poses special problems for the evaluator. Let me illustrate these points by first describing the current form these questions are taking in the Chapter 1 program, and then telling you how we are addressing them.

Questions regarding the appropriateness of federal investments in this area were big questions when the program was first legislated in 1965. Tangled up in the decision about whether to authorize were questions about whether or not private schools should receive money, and whether the Federal government should give money to segregated schools. These are special forms of the question of appropriateness of the funding agency's--in this case, the federal government's--involvement. Once the initial decision was made, these questions tended to recede for the next several years. They have recently started to come back to the forefront as part of a larger debate about the appropriateness of the federal government's involvement in a number of areas. Even now, though, these questions are raised more by conservative interest groups outside of government, and occasionally by individuals within the

Education Department, than by members of the relevant Congressional committees. The Congressional staff with whom I spoke when developing the plan for this study continue to assume that this program constitutes a legitimate investment. Of course, questions regarding legitimacy are not empirical questions anyway, and I would not recommend that evaluators address them. But because these questions are value-laden, they sensitize all of the participants. To that extent, evaluators need to be aware that such questions are being asked, for they can sensitize evaluation findings as well.

Questions regarding effectiveness also present special problems for evaluators. They are the primary questions that evaluators have been trained to answer, they are the questions evaluators tend to think are most important, and they are the questions evaluators want most to answer. But they often are not the foremost question on the minds of those we tend to call decision makers. There are several reasons for this. One is that decision makers tend to think of outcomes differently than evaluators do. In the case of Chapter 1, for instance, getting the money to the right children is an outcome of great interest, and many Congressmen tend to assume that once that is accomplished, it is up to the district to see that the funds have an effect on those children. For these legislators, evidence that the funds are flowing in the right direction is evidence of program effectiveness. Another reason they place less emphasis on formal evidence of effectiveness is that they tend to accept other kinds of evidence regarding effectiveness. The legislative system, like the legal system, is designed to accept primarily verbal testimony. And verbal testimony tends to emphasize

anecdotes and first-hand experiences. In the case of the Chapter 1 program, there is yet a third reason why our audience has not emphasized effectiveness, and that has to do with the age of the program. It has existed for 20 years now, and has been evaluated on a number of occasions. One of the things I was impressed by when I interviewed Congressional staff was their familiarity with these evaluation findings. This is not to say that they had all reached the same conclusions about the program, however. Their perceptions varied from enthusiastic regarding its successes to disappointed by it. Yet because they all had a broad range of evidence to draw on, questions regarding the impact of the program on children tended to be asked only as an afterthought.

The third universally-applicable question, having to do with whether or how well the program can be implemented, is receiving the largest emphasis in the Chapter 1 program right now. This emphasis is evident in the mandate for our study: of the seven items in the mandate for this study, only one asked about effectiveness. The other six asked for the kind of descriptive information frequently used to indicate how, or how well, a program is being implemented. The bill requires information about:

- The recipients,
- The services,
- The background and training of teachers and staff,
- Coordination of services,
- How funds are allocated among schools,
- Effectiveness, and
- How certain key provisions are implemented.

Notice that most of these items refer only descriptive data, and do not reveal the questions that lie behind the requirements. Consultations with congressional staff enabled us to learn how the required descriptive data were expected to be useful--that is, what the Congress expected them to indicate about the program. In addition, these consultations exposed us to a variety of other issues not even hinted at in the mandate. The questions raised during my interviews with Hill staff included questions about the implications of the most recent legislative changes, about what the states are doing now, about the role of parents, about services to special populations such as children with limited English proficiency, about whether the rules are accomplishing what that were intended to accomplish, whether they are unnecessarily burdensome, and so forth. Like the written mandate, they emphasized implementation more than effectiveness.

This brief review gives you some idea of the configuration of questions that probably will be asked during the 1987 reauthorization hearings. Questions regarding appropriateness of the federal role will probably be asked. While these are not empirical questions, their very existence sensitizes participants, and also makes evaluation data more sensitive. Questions about effectiveness are being asked largely as an afterthought, even though there are disparities in perceptions of the program's effectiveness. Questions regarding implementation predominated, both in the written mandate and in conversations. The dominance of this area over others is partly due to the fact that the rules for the program were recently altered, and most legislative staff wanted to know whether these changes in law helped or hindered districts as they attempted to provide

services to disadvantaged youth.

As a result of these conversations, we have decided that the vast majority of our procured studies should concentrate on implementation questions. Within this broad field, we have identified four major substantive areas which these procurements will focus on. One of these is Administration. Falling within this area are a variety of questions having to do with the adequacy of various requirements, and the burdensomeness of others. This area also includes questions regarding the state role, and interactions among federal, state and local agencies. The second area is Targeting, in which fall questions about the selection of both the schools and the students which will participate in this program. This area appears to be continually of interest to the Congress, in part because the program is intended to serve a particular kind of child, and in part because there is no obvious or natural method for identifying these children, so that the possibility for slippage between intend and reality is great. The third area is Program Design, which includes questions not only about the design of local programs, but also about the processes used to develop these designs--how parents are involved, for instance, and how evaluation results are used. Finally, we have the area of Services, which includes questions about the nature, quantity, and quality of services provided to students.

Anyone who is familiar with evaluations of Chapter 1, or with evaluations in general, will probably notice that the areas we are studying are indeed similar to areas studied by others. These similarities reflect, I think, the universality of the questions we have been asked to address. In

fact, because many of our research questions are similar to questions asked by earlier evaluators of this program, many of our studies are being designed to replicate earlier studies. We hope, by doing this, to be able to make cross-time comparisons regarding how the program is being carried out.

Now let me describe two ways in which I think our study differs from others. One has to do with how we will handle the effectiveness question, the other with how we have designed our studies in the implementation areas.

With regard to effectiveness, it seemed to us unnecessary to conduct yet another large, expensive study of the effectiveness of the Chapter 1 program, which could then be criticized like those before it for its design and its choice of measures. Yet it did seem that there were some legitimate questions that could be addressed. For instance, there was considerable disparity among perceptions of the program's effectiveness, and we felt we could help Congress by reviewing the wealth of information that already existed about the program, summarizing it for them and explaining why there were discrepancies among study findings. In addition, several people did ask about the relationship between certain requirements and effectiveness. For instance, there was a belief that many districts implement pullout programs largely to comply with fiscal accounting rules, not because these are necessarily effective program designs. There seemed to be an interest in knowing more about how the Congress, through its rule-making, could facilitate local program design so that the effectiveness of the program could be enhanced. We therefore decided to provide the Congress with a separate report which focuses solely on questions of effectiveness, but which

reviews existing evidence rather than gathering new evidence. We hope this report will explain some of the methodological difficulties associated with trying to measure effectiveness, as well as summarize the relationships between program characteristics and student outcomes that have been identified.

The second way in which our study differs from others is in the way in which our studies of implementation are being designed. We have the advantage of 20 years of experience in studying this program, and have tried to benefit from that experience. The most important methodological assumption we make is that the program exists within a context. Stated so simply, it hardly seems astounding, but it is the single most important lesson we derived from the literature. It means that when we look to see how districts are implementing certain provisions we must also look to see what aspects of their particular situation facilitate or inhibit their ability (or desire) to implement these provisions. Here are some examples of how we have taken context into account in designing some of our studies.

1. We wanted a study that would tell us how districts identify schools as eligible to receive a Chapter 1 program, and how they select the actual schools and students that will participate in the program. We also wanted a study that would tell us how they allocate their resources among participating schools. While it would be possible to address either of these questions without regard for what else is happening in school districts, we have instead designed these two studies to include data regarding students who have been placed in other categorical programs such as bilingual education and special education, and data regarding how resources from

these other programs are distributed among schools.

2. We wanted a study that would give us good descriptive information about the services that Chapter 1 students receive. In fact, we wanted two studies, one that would provide survey statistics about services, and another that would provide more intensive, qualitative descriptions of services. Because of our awareness of context, we have designed both of these studies to include data regarding services outside the immediate Chapter 1 classroom. Survey questionnaires, for instance, will go to school principals, Chapter 1 teachers, regular teachers, special education teachers, and others, if we feel it would be appropriate. For the qualitative study, we won't merely observe Chapter 1 classrooms, but will actually follow students through their entire school day, to see how this one segment of their education fits into the whole pattern.

In thinking about how to come to terms with context, we now realize that there are two very different kinds of contexts that can influence the fate of the Chapter 1 program. One of them includes local organizational factors such as the distribution of eligible children in the district, the arrangement of classrooms and teachers among schools, and the variety of management or budgetary constraints that Chapter 1 directors face as they design and implement their programs. The other is more subtle: it is the mood of the district, and even the mood of the nation, regarding what is important in education and where education should be going. The Chapter 1 program exists not only in an organizational context, but also in a cultural climate which influences its form and purpose. I don't know if we would have realized that there was a cultural climate to take into consideration if the

nation were not now in the midst of a major reform movement in education. But given that reform movement, we have also become concerned about how it might bear on the Chapter 1 program. The issues here are far more subtle and complex than the organizational issues I just alluded to. Beatrice Birman will now discuss these issues.